

DEC GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE TELECOMMUTING PROGRAM

A successful telecommuting program will ensure that the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) does its part in contributing to reduced levels of both air pollution and highway congestion. Since these are objectives that the Department promotes with the general public, it is important that the Department strongly support these initiatives internally as well.

The Department is establishing a telecommuting program, based, in part, on the successful pilot program that has been in place since 1998. These guidelines set forth the minimal elements of the program, as approved by the Department. The Office of Employee Relations and the Albany Pollution and Energy Reduction Committee (PERC)* will periodically conduct information sessions on the telecommuting program to inform interested employees of the requirements for participation in the program. Employees can apply for the program at any time. However, participation in the telecommuting program may begin only after attending the mandatory training sessions offered on a monthly basis. Duties which may be suitable for telecommuting include, but are not limited to: reviewing documents and reports; writing reports and memoranda; spreadsheet analysis and other computer related work.

Criteria for Participation

Participation in the telecommuting program is voluntary. It is open to all PS&T and MC Central Office employees of the Department of Environmental Conservation who meet all of the following criteria:

1. The employee's time and attendance history is satisfactory and reliable;
2. The employee's work performance is satisfactory;
3. The employee may at times be relied upon to perform his/her duties without direct supervision;
4. The employee does not participate in the Albany Compressed Pay Period pilot program.

Program Elements

1. Training for the telecommuter and the supervisor will be provided.
2. Telecommuting will be limited to a maximum of four days in any two week pay period.
3. Telecommuting will be allowed for whole days only.
4. To the extent practical, telecommuting days should be established on a routine schedule. It is recognized, however, that the work of certain employees may not follow a routine schedule thus flexibility in selecting telecommuting days may be needed. Also, meetings, or other scheduled events may necessitate flexibility in telecommuting days. Supervisors reserve the right to require an employee to come into the office on what would otherwise be a telecommuting day, if the employee's physical presence is required to properly address an assignment.

5. Consistent with Department work rules, overtime or compensatory time will be allowed only with the prior approval of the supervisor.
6. The telecommuter must properly account for all leave the same as for non-telecommuting days.
7. Workers Compensation benefits will apply to injuries which arise out of and in the course of employment in the telecommuting work place.
8. The assignment of employees to a telecommuting schedule will be made on the basis of seniority, all other considerations being equal.
9. The approval of a telecommuting schedule will not alter the existing shift assignments, or the Voluntary Reduction in Work Schedule (VRWS) schedules of other employees within a bureau or work unit, except by the mutual agreement of the affected employees and their supervisors.

Application Procedures

1. An interested employee will submit an application, identifying why his/her assigned work is appropriate for telecommuting, to his or her immediate supervisor, who will approve, or disapprove the application. The employee may modify the application in response to review at the supervisor, bureau or division level.
2. A supervisor's approval or disapproval of the application will be based on the criteria for participation as outlined in these guidelines, and the supervisor's analysis of the impact of the proposed work schedule on the operational needs of the work unit. The application then goes to the Bureau Director.
3. The Bureau Director's approval or disapproval of the application will be based on the criteria for participation as outlined in these guidelines, and the Bureau Director's analysis of the impact of the proposed work schedule on the operational needs of the Bureau. The application then goes to the Division Director.
4. The Division Director's approval or disapproval of the application will be based upon the criteria for participation as outlined in these guidelines, as well as concern for the potential impact on the overall operations and mission of the Division. The Division Director's approval or disapproval regarding an employee's participation in the program is considered to be final.
5. The Division Director's office must submit all approved applications to the Personnel Office two (2) weeks before the telecommuting is scheduled to begin. The division will send a copy of both approved and disapproved applications to the PERC along with any suggestions for improving the telecommuting program, application procedure and guidelines.
6. Participants must attend a mandatory training session prior to joining the telecommuting program.

Opting Out Procedures

1. An employee and supervisor may, by mutual agreement, terminate the employee's participation at any time.
2. Upon two (2) weeks prior notification, an employee may withdraw from the program.
3. Upon two (2) weeks notification, a supervisor may withdraw an employee's approval to continue participation in the program.

Duties and Obligations

1. The telecommuter and supervisor will establish a mechanism for assigning tasks to be performed on telecommuting days. For some job descriptions and employees this may include specific agreements as to the work to be performed on a given day. For others more general assignments may be appropriate. Telecommuting will place additional burdens on the supervisor to monitor the performance of the telecommuter. The arrangement established for one employee may not be needed or appropriate for another.
2. Work hours should be the same as the hours worked in the office. Upon occasion these hours may be adjusted with prior approval of the supervisor.
3. Scheduled telecommuting work hours will only be utilized to perform official DEC business related activities.
4. The telecommuter must be reachable at their work area (residence) on telecommuting days unless prior arrangements are made. If during the day the telecommuter must be away from the work area, he/she must inform the supervisor.
5. Co-workers should be aware of the telecommuter's schedule so that communication problems can be minimized and calls for the telecommuter can be appropriately forwarded.
6. In instances where the telecommuter has been provided Department equipment, Departmental property management procedures will be followed to ensure proper transfer of DEC property to the employee's residence.
7. In instances where the telecommuter is using a DEC computer, DEC's guidelines for computer use apply.

Work Space, Equipment and Supplies

1. The telecommuter must provide a safe work space within his/her residence which can be dedicated to the performance of assigned tasks without interruption. For example, telecommuting is not a substitute for child care. With 48 hours notice telecommuting work space may be inspected for safety and appropriateness.
2. Supplies, such as paper, pencils, etc., will be obtained from the Department. The telecommuter will not otherwise be reimbursed for the purchase of supplies.

3. The telecommuter must have a telephone conveniently located to the work space.
4. If the telecommuter's work space is located such that phone calls to the office are long distance, or if the telecommuter's tasks include placing calls to locations other than the office, the Department will provide the telecommuter with a calling card.
5. For some telecommuters the telephone may be the only equipment needed. For others, the proper performance of the telecommuter's tasks may require a computer. Whether other equipment is needed should be determined between the telecommuter and program management. The availability of equipment will be contingent upon the ability of the telecommuter's Division to purchase it or DEC to provide it from departmental surplus supplies.
6. Computer equipment requirements:
 - a.) DEC Computer Network Access: If the telecommuter needs a personal computer (PC) that must be connected to the DEC network (including via GroupWise Remote), a DEC PC will be provided. It will be a reasonably current model as approved by the Division of Information Services (DIS).
 - b.) Stand Alone Computer Applications: If the telecommuter needs a PC for software applications (e.g., WordPerfect, spreadsheets, or databases) but does not have to be connected to the DEC network, it is preferable but not necessary that a DEC PC be provided.
 - c.) Groupwise Access Only: If the telecommuter needs a PC to only access e-mail, use of the telecommuter's personal PC to connect to GroupWise Web over the internet will suffice.
7. When a DEC PC is provided:
 - a.) The telecommuter will take precautions to prevent the use of the DEC PC by unauthorized persons. These precautions will include maintaining a secret boot-up password and screen saver password.
 - b.) The Division of Information Services (DIS) will furnish and maintain the PC operating system, data communications software, virus protection, word processing and browser. DIS will assist the telecommuter with installation and maintenance of other software provided by the telecommuter's division.
 - c.) The telecommuter will transport the DEC PC to and from the office if it becomes necessary for DIS to have hands-on access to the DEC PC.
 - d.) If the telecommuter has cable access to the internet (e.g. Roadrunner), a cable router must be used to act as a hardware firewall . In addition, there should be a firewall software package on the PC itself to prevent intrusion if the router is breached.

8. When the telecommuter's personal PC is used:
 - a.) The telecommuter will use the virus protection software provided on his/her normal office PC to ensure that files loaded onto the office PC from the personal PC are not infected (i.e., all files are scanned by the office computer for viruses).
 - b.) The telecommuter may copy software from his/her office PC to the personal PC to the extent allowed by each software license.
 - c.) Maintenance of the telecommuter's personal equipment is the responsibility of the telecommuter.

9. It is recommended that telecommuters use ergonomically designed furniture in the home office. If a laptop computer is used, it is recommended that a full size monitor and keyboard be used.

Department Oversight of the Telecommuting Program and Periodic Review of Guidelines

The Albany PERC committee will continue to meet quarterly to discuss implementation of the telecommuting program and to make recommendations to address employee or supervisor concerns with the program. On at least an annual basis, the Guidelines for Telecommuting will be reviewed by the Albany PERC committee, and revised as necessary. Suggestions for improving the telecommuting program, application procedure and guidelines, or explanations for withdrawals from the program, may be sent to PERC by any DEC employee.

*The Albany Pollution and Energy Reduction Committee is a Labor/Management committee comprised of representatives from the Public Employees Federation, the Civil Service Employees Association, the Employees Relations Office, Personnel Office and interested Central Office Divisions.

PERC (July 23, 2002)